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ABSTRACT

The "elitist" tradition of American education was found out in the 1960's. Not until a social force quite alien to the profession took hold and a revolution was declared, was the system of education called to task. In education, the response generated a spate of books that examined the many inequities, recommending remedies. Some of these studies became popular reading, either by dint of their daring or the esteem of their authors. Among the first was "Slums and Suburbs," by James B. Conant. Despite the intellectual concessions and comprised recommendations of this book, the study marked a beginning that was to encourage closer scrutiny and clearer perception of the underprivileged by educational researchers. Most popular among them was Frank Reissman and his book "The Culturally Deprived Child." There yet remained a more intimate, realistic study to be made of the ghetto and its youthful inhabitants. Kenneth B. Clark's "Dark Ghetto" was just such a book. The evil of ghetto school education was fully recognized by the mid-1960's. It followed that in the resolution of these problems that consideration would be given to school leadership. Nat Hentoff's "Our Children are Dying" afforded just such a view. Many of the benefits to be derived from these years of educational study in the sixties were reflected in "The Disadvantaged--Challenge to Education," by Mario D. Fantini and Gerald Weinstein. (Author/JM)

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Inner City Education: A Review of Ethnic Studies in the Sixties

by Warren J. Halliburton

The "elitist" tradition of American education, it might be said, was found out in the 1960's. Until that time, the institution remained largely sacrosanct, seemingly impervious to its occasional criticism that education concern itself with students and their needs. Such placement of responsibility was a sacrificial offering and in no way seen as disturbing the sacred cow of teaching nor to having educators held accountable for student learning. Not until a social force quite alien to the profession took hold and a revolution declared, was the system of education called to task. By then, people enchanted with a dream were moved to hope, and those disenchanted with reality were driven to demonstrate for a better life.

Caught in this emotional uplift, critics of education joined forces to appall over the neglect and to write of the need for change in the schools. In this new day there was world enough for Americans to seek out the best their nation had to offer, and time enough to build a new life. Many went seeking far from the madding crowd of the city to the Camelot of suburbia. They were mostly white. Those left behind were mostly blacks. Their frustration grew to rebellion, creating a revolution for social reform.

In education the response generated a spate of books that examined the many inequities and recommended remedies. Some of these studies became popular reading, either by dint of their daring or esteem of their authors. Among the first was *Slums and Suburbs* by James B. Conant (McGraw-Hill, 1961). In his writing the former president of Harvard University, responding to the failure of education in the slums, shifted the blame of responsibility from the school to the home. Therein, he studiously reported, was the heart of education's plight: that the accomplishments of the public schools were determined, by and large, by the status and ambitions of the families they served.

Steeped in personal observations and sociological theory, the study was impressive in its honesty of intent, if timid in its doctrine. But the internationally renowned educator had spoken out, and the effect was to call to serious question the institution of public education. Those reluctant to commit themselves were now comforted to heed the cry for changing the education and lives of slum children.

Although tepid reading today, *Slums and Suburbs* was innovative, its spirit advanced by the use of the word "slum" in the title at a time when the inner city of contemporary use was wearing the imprimatur of "depressed area." Harkening back to his youth, Conant recognized the scar tissue of slums as resistive to the cosmetics of words; he called for surgery of social reform. In this way alone could the failure of education be reckoned with and perhaps changed, he maintained.

In developing his thesis Conant claimed, "The dramatic contrasts between schools in the slums and schools in the suburbs illustrate the impossibility of discussing education without specifying the kinds of homes from which the pupils come." As a symptom of his educational malaise, he cited the plight of reading among slum children, its failure despite "impressive reading programs" and the struggle of "valiant teachers" against overwhelming adversities. "If we could change the family attitude toward reading," he went on to say, "we could accomplish much."

What emerged was a grappling with symptoms and ignoring of causes. Reading Conant today is to recognize how the chinks in his educational reform have widened with age. He relegated racial discrimination to an economic factor. "It is the socioeconomic situation," he said, "not the color of the children which makes the Negro slum schools so difficult. The real issue is not racial integration but socio economic integration." As such, he declared, to equate integrated education with quality education is "to take an extremely defeatist view of Negro education in the large cities." And, dwelling on the difficulties, he found the busing of children to be "out of the question."

Conceding to the history of inequality dealt the Negro, Conant lamented the stigma educators placed on the black child's I.Q. while recognizing the distraction of poverty. Yet he appeared to perpetuate the wrong by advocating that "the system of rigid tracks (ability grouping) may be the only workable solution to a mammoth guidance problem." Either apparently more discouraged by – or more sympathetic to – the system than committed to the education of black children, he admitted that "ability grouping and tracks complicate *de facto* segregated classes, especially in integrated schools," but hedged on the alternatives. Rather, he seemed to accept this

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inequality because of "limited guidance personnel and with pupils and parents indifferent if not hostile to education in the large city." His feelings of ambivalence now reinforced, Conant suggested the compromise that there be three groups of students, with the middle group adjudged "average" constituting the largest and most integrated.

Yet, despite the intellectual concessions and compromised recommendations of *Slums and Suburbs*, the study marked a beginning that was to encourage closer scrutiny and clearer perception of the underprivileged by educators more skilled in educational research than polemical in language. Most popular among them was Frank Reissman and his book *The Culturally Deprived Child* (Harper & Row, 1962). In what was a new approach to the disadvantaged, the professor of educational psychology attempted to show that there were positive aspects in black ghetto culture to be considered. His book became an important statement about the educational neglect of children most in need of help.

Drawing heavily from his own experiences and research, Reissman's expressed purposes were to provide "teachers, social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists with a picture of the deprived individual that would enable them to work in a fruitful way." The cleavage between the deprived child and the school, he scored as having reached "new heights." To fill this "appalling gap between pretentions and practices," he recognized that Johnny must be understood for his culture. This cannot be realized, Reissman pointed out, "in the teacher turnover and imposition of misguidance and patronization rampant in ghetto schools." But, then he quickly undid the lesson as he went on to describe these families as traditionally "old-fashioned," patriarchal,* superstitious, somewhat religious and frequently suspicious of "talk" and "new-fangled ideas."

In making his case for the disadvantaged, Reissman explained differences between the slow and the poor learner, distinctions for which we are still grateful as we work with children of whatever economic background. But in applying this recognition to those culturally disadvantaged, he inadvertently relegated them to stereotypes of another kind, as in the following all too pat descriptions: "physicial and visual rather than aural," "content-centered rather than form-centered," "externally oriented rather than introspective," "problem-centered rather than abstract-centered," "inductive rather than temporal," "slow, careful, patient, persevering (in areas of importance) rather than quick, clever, facile, flexible." The implications were all but alarming in that "advantaged" children, therefore, were aural, form-centered, introspective, abstract-centered, temporal, quick, clever, facile and flexible!

Reissman issued this caution: "Teaching deprived children does not consist of gimmicks or tricks....For example, toughness and brutality (by teachers) are most ineffective [practices]. Perhaps the best overall principle is to be *consistent*." Yes! But is this or any other of the educational maxims any more applicable to the disadvantaged than the advantaged? Such a disregard led the author to further stereotyping, as he said, "one of the reasons why the new teaching machines are likely to appeal to the deprived child is that they operate pretty much like games." The same question emerges, of whether the implied educational needs of children of different socio-economic backgrounds are mostly real or contrived.

To further convince the reader of the latter, Reissman claimed that "Deprived children have acquired a number of attitudes and fears that militate against learning. *Fear of failure* is significant in this regard." The question begs itself. Is this fear of failure any less among the advantaged as the author suggests?

Reissman recognized that there are teachers who want to teach history, for example, to children, as there are others who want to teach children history. The distinction is real as was his contention that the teachers of children are the ones who do the more meaningful job. But then Reissman was once again to succumb to the primary thrust of his writing the identification of the disadvantaged. This proved its own distraction to the larger significance of his study, which was to attract public interest to ghetto education and sensitize teachers to what was largely their problem of rejecting children of backgrounds different from their own. In this way Reissman may be said to have helped improve the education of all children.

There yet remained a more intimate, realistic study to be made of the ghetto and its youthful inhabitants. Kenneth B. Clark's *Dark Ghetto* (Harper & Row, 1965) was just such a book, based on the author's personal experiences while serving as chief consultant to Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited (Haryou). A landmark program in community action, Clark's study was a document greatly anticipated and to be reckoned with, having as its precursor the distinguished black psychologist's report, "Youth in the Ghetto: A Study of the Consequences of Powerlessness and a Blueprint for Change." Probing the pathologies of Harlem and its "social victims," Clark questioned the effectiveness of social work agencies and public school teachers and administrators.

In a market saturated with pedagogical treatises on blacks, Clark yet contributed understanding to what was becoming an educational dilemma. His hypothesis that inhabitants of the ghetto were *not* responsible for their condition established a new basis for consideration.

In his chapter, "Ghetto Schools: Separate and Unequal" Clark's data showed mounting evidence that teacher attitude toward their students was the most important factor in attempting to understand the massive retardation of ghetto children. Clearly, the buck-passing had stopped.

"False assumptions about Negro students and their deprivations breeds hopelessness and excuses.... The results are a self-fulfilling prophesy inducing and perpetuating the very pathology which [teachers] claim to remedy," he stated. "The most recent version of the environmentalistic approach comes under the general heading of 'cultural deprivation.' "

The evidence, in Clark's professional judgment and experience, was compounded by poor teacher preparation, tenure and inexperience. But the stereotyping was historical. He stated: "Just as those who proposed the earlier racial inferiority theories were invariably members of the dominant racial groups who presumed themselves and their groups superior, those who proposed the cultural deprivation theory were, in fact, members of the privileged group who inevitably

*The Negro sub-culture is exceptional, being matriarchal.

associated their privileged status with their own innate intellect and its related educational success." This was the ego feeding that alienated and relegated the minority to the role of the disadvantaged. Its recognition by Clark seriously questioned the assumptions of such esteemed educational innovators as Conant and Reissman.

As for the youngsters, how could they learn without teacher expectation? They could learn, Clark insisted, though perhaps at times with more passion than reason. He said:

> Given no evidence to the contrary, the assumption can be made that cultural and economic backgrounds of pupils do not constitute a barrier to the type of learning which can reasonably be expected of normal children in the elementary grades – however much of a barrier such backgrounds are in respect to social problems such as delinquency, emotional stability (etc.).

Or as he stated later, "Only when [background] is permitted to be a barrier does it become a cumulative deteriorating force."

In this first close study of the ghetto as an historical experience rather than a sociological treatise, Clarke refuted Conant's pointing the finger of blame at the family. And where Conant minimized the effects of segregated education and Reissman merely recognized its harm, Clark charged that segregation and inferior education reinforced one another, not only in quality but like an infectious disease. Supported by laws in the South and community custom and indifference in the North "the equality of the schools does indeed decline–not because Negroes are inferior, but because the school system behaves as though they are." The goals of quality education must therefore be integrated. "...one is not possible without the other."

Clark's study was persuasive as he stated that he was tired of the false objectivity of the "balanced view." In his quest for an integrated program of education that would slow if not stop the practice of black children going through school at a diminishing rate of learning, Clark might have anticipated some of the complications–that the very process requires a recognition of integration as a change of both cultures, not a loss of one. For it is this threat which has produced a new rebellion, one giving arrest to changing an institution as old as that of segregation itself in America.

The evil of ghetto school education was by the mid-60's fully recognized, and the reasons for its persistance thoroughly aired–from the pathology of family weaknesses and student resistance, to the scourge of teacher apathy. If followed, therefore, in the resolution of these problems that consideration would be given to school leadership. Nat Hentoff's *Our Children are Dying* (Viking Press, 1966) afforded just such a view. From the author's record of conversations with Principal Elliott Shapiro and some of the staff of his Harlem school, emerged an intimate portrait of the man and a vivid account of the conditons in which he worked.

Scandalized by the "incident of the rat," Public School 119 became the symbol of the infestation and ineptitude fostered upon ghetto schools throughout the Harlem community. The saving grace was its principal, a trained psychologist with infinite patience and understanding who was willing to apply all of his exceptional skills to what was described as a virtually hopeless situation–the teaching of ghetto youths. Exercising unorthodox methods to achieve human relationships among those with whom he worked, Shapiro estranged himself from the educational establishment while endearing himself to his community of parents, children, and his staff of teachers.

The book reads more as a testimonial to a man than as a program for change. But in Hentoff's bigger than life portrait, Principal Shapiro served as a model for success of one who was involved not so much with his school as with his children, their families and teachers. This is not to say that Hentoff did not make significant points, too. We were reminded that such leadership serves as a "constant stimulus" of ideas. Example was given in the teacher-created manual, "African and Afro-American History, A Bibliography of Materials for Teachers and Students," compiled by Berle Banfield. This comprehensive 75 pages of information on African folklore, family life, games, music, dance, art, foods and history, along with a bibliography came at a time when there was little information of this kind to be found anywhere. And it was developed at the urging of a conscientious white principal responding to the need of a black community for the inclusion of American Negro and African history and culture in the curriculum at a time when such professional responsibility was hardly fashionable.

Through Shapiro, Hentoff went on to write that the school must "take the learning styles of...children into account," and to explain that some children learn physically through motion, some learn complicated things through the song and dance. Each culture can teach in different ways to different tunes.

The book condemned tests administered in lieu of understanding, it attacked texts that distorted the human spirit of the slave, and it recognized the fact that black children in the city can take care of themselves better than middle-class youngsters.

Although the Shapiro of Hentoff's book might be questioned for his rather quixotic advocacy of one-to-one testing, his economic theory of segregation, and for his partial solution of "ordering" that principals take leadership in encouraging Negro families to live in their communities, and although he might be held suspect for advocating that bright and superior feeling blacks be sent to integrated schools, he cannot be faulted for his compassion. It is this quality in the education of children which we might do well to recognize and emulate.

Many of the benefits to be derived from these years of educational study in the 60's were reflected in *The Disadvantaged–Challenge to Education*, by Mario D. Fantini and Gerald Weinstein (Harper & Row, 1968) who projected the beginnings of a new science of pedagogy. Studying the educational process in America, the authors presented a documented case history against the now certified assumption that the so-called "disadvantaged" represented a unique and specialized problem, one which they saw as the pervasive problem of education in America. Fantini and Weinstein took up the cudgel of Kenneth Clark's hypothesis and offered proof that "...any child or youth for whom the curriculum is outdated, inadequate, or irrelevant can be included in this (disadvantaged) category." Thus, while the authors thought first of the impoverished and racial or ethnic minorities, they worried, too, about the middle-class suburbanites.

Their focus was on the "hidden curriculum," one they saw as far more "oriented to reality than the school's method and

materials are prepared to face." They saw the duality resulting in the "phoney school" curriculum of a "sugar-coated" world of "antiseptic" problems. The effects were lethal, the authors found, condemning most children to the miseducation of "ceptmanship" (accepting poor texts, irrelevant grades and meaningless curriculum).

The second half of *The Disadvantaged* developed a massive program of educational reform. The recommendation was not of the product but the process: "teacher techniques, curriculum content and teacher training, ...administrative organization and personnel, from the physical plant to the very attitudes and philosophy of the educational system." This new model, said the authors, is based on the belief that institutions must adjust to people rather than the other way around.

The textbook organization and educational jargon of *The Disadvantaged* were unfortunate, serving only as a distraction to such grand if not totally practical recommendations as, "tapping the sources of power in the federal and state governments and private foundations and developing strategy through human resources." The authors cited the first step toward achieving this goal as the creation of an atmosphere of change, to lead bureaucracy toward behavioral change in each of its members.

Then there are the epigrams:

> A good teacher is a good teacher no matter whom she may have to teach...; relevant curriculum is diversified...; contact through pupil content...; teacher training institutions have, more often than not, been most concerned with "good" schools, "good" pupils and the "good" teachers...grounded in the structure of knowledge rather than in a mass of facts.

This was the understanding of the educational crisis as popularized in the writing of the 60's. The writing marked a renaissance in pedagogy that was to begin to end the neglect in the education of black children in the ghetto and launch an era of accountability.

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